

THE JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY

BALTIMORE, MARYLAND 21218

DEPARTMENT OF BIOLOGY

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Dr. Carol Rittner
The Elie Wiesel Foundation for Humanity
666 Fifth Avenue, 11th Floor
New York, NY 10103

Dear Dr. Rittner:

Enclosed are my "trigger" remarks for the conference in Paris.

See you there.

Sincerely,

Chris Anfinsen

CBA:djh
Enclosure

I have been asked to give a short "trigger" presentation on the general problem of human rights. The problem is so vast and complex that it is almost an impertinence to attempt to arrive at any kind of generalization about this area of human existence. In the best of all possible worlds, every human being should have a full stomach, an agreeable occupation, and the freedom to select without coercion his representatives in the government under which he lives. The organizers of this conference have emphasized the word "tolerance" at various points in the outline, and this, of course, is the kernel. An international, totally accepted system of oversight and implementation would be the ideal answer. This kind of system could be applied to a variety of situations that foster local acceptability of strong totalitarian state machineries; religious persecution; suppression of freedom of speech; and forms of modern slavery that grow out of economic pressures, over-population, and inadequate public health.

Slavery, as we usually think of it, still exists in small pockets of the world. On the other hand, poverty and overpopulation induce a kind of large-scale slavery which we all know about. The pseudo-slavery brought about by poverty and overpopulation exists in most countries, even those that are most highly developed in terms of democratic principles. What is needed here is a selfless, enlightened altruism implanted in the genes of those who control our large industrial and bureaucratic institutions.

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National ideologies are extremely common and widespread in our present-day world. As we all know, many political systems have built into them laws or, at least, understandings about the illegality of religion or the proscribed legality of a particular type of religion. For example, at the moment, the Middle East is undergoing a conflagration which makes sense, presumably, to those who are participating but which is very difficult for many of the rest of us to comprehend since we are neither Sunnis or Shiites. The same can be said, of course, for Arabs and Jews and, for that matter, for the individuals who live in the north and south of Ireland.

National ideologies become more severe and ambitious in those instances where there is a desire for power and control, and for territorial possession. We are, at the moment, seeing a large number of conflagrations that involve this kind of hate and drive. In some parts of the world, for example, enormous tensions abound allegedly related to the differences in ideology that underly communism on the one hand, and "democracy" on the other. The Phillipines, Central America, and numerous areas of Africa are undergoing such troubles. It is not clear whether the problems underlying these conflicts are truly related to the ideologies that are expressed or to -- what seems more likely -- the desire to "take over."

I have not touched some of the more extreme sequela such as torture, imprisonment, execution, and banishment. These are

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operations that are, indeed, the most frightening, but at the same time, represent a set of behavior patterns growing out of the larger problem of aggression and lack of tolerance.

To try to suggest ways and means to counteract in a massive and effective way some of the pains that mankind is now undergoing would appear to me to be, as I mentioned above, impertinent. A United Nations organization and a World Court that really worked would be marvelous solutions, but I sometimes think that mankind will cease its bickering and will stand shoulder-to-shoulder in a united way only when the Martians are about to land on the earth. We can, however, do something about population and nutrition, and possibly, religious conflict. I would like to try to help, and I think that that attitude is with us all at this conference.